

SHADES OF GRAY

Eric Anderson

... That was our last summer. After that we grew up fast: no time to wonder about things, only time enough to decide. And with everything moving so quickly, decisions made one minute got reversed by decisions made the next. So you couldn't really do anything that was right or wrong; you just did things. I wish it could be the way John says it was in the beginning—light against darkness. But it isn't simple anymore. I remember only one simple thing about growing up, and that part doesn't seem to fit.

The stream ran muddy that August. The rain that washed the dirt in was making it flow bigger and faster, too. The rapids were still white and in the shallow pools it was hardly noticeable because you could still see every pebble on the bottom. But in the deep pools the water looked brown where any other year the light would have gone right down into it.

The rapids were right under the bridge. The bridge is set right on the banks, but the banks are so high there that standing on the bridge, you could spit and count to two before it hit. You couldn't see it hit the surface, because of the rapids. But you could tell one moment it was there and the next it wasn't.

Upstream the banks are as high and so steep they're almost perpendicular to the surface of the water. They are widened out a little, though, and the stream is very deep there. At the top of the bank on one side are some big trees that hang half-way over the water. But the top of the other bank is flat and grassy. We'd drive out and spend the day lots of times; it was quiet there, and pretty. We'd bring a lunch and eat, then lie around on the grass in the sun and nap or shoot the bull or whatever. And of course with the swimming hole right there, that place had just about everything.

The last time we went up we weren't even going to go in swimming because the water was so muddy. But the day kept getting hotter and the water was looking better and better. So finally Phillip says "the hell with it," takes off his shirt and sneakers and jumps in. It didn't take Don and me half a minute to do the same.

I'll never forget how it felt just jumping in because the air was so hot and the water so cold, being mostly rain. Going from all-hot one

minute to all-cold the next makes you giddy somehow and I had to swim across and hold onto the bank until it subsided a little.

Then Phil says he's got an idea and disappears toward the car. He comes back across the bridge carrying the tow-rope from the trunk and climbs up one of those trees above me that hang over the water.

"I been meaning to do this," he yells down. "But I never had the ambition."

He ties one end of the rope in the tree and lets the other end drop. The end of the rope hangs just above the surface of the water.

"Perfect," I tell him.

Phil goes first.

When he swings it looks almost like slow-motion camera because it's only the force of his own weight against the angle of the rope that's carrying him out over the water. When he's half-way over he lets go. The invention is a success.

I want to get some more swing out of the rope, so I take hold a ways down and jump down toward the water. The jolt from the slack coming out of the rope jerks the rope out of my hands. I fall into the water about three feet from the bank.

Don's improvement on the system is to take hold even farther down than I did and get a running start. He has a tight hold, too, so the rope won't come out of his hands. When he gets out over the water he's just a blur, he's moving so fast.

I don't know why he didn't let go. If he'd have let go then we would have just gone home like any other day. Maybe he didn't really have time or he wasn't thinking or wasn't watching. Maybe he was scared.

But he didn't let go and his body smacked almost flat against the wall of the bank. He fell backwards into the water and he didn't come up.

Me and Phil go right in after him, but the water is so muddy we can't see a thing. We'd go under and lose our direction and didn't know if we were checking places we already checked or what. Once we both come up for air at the same time and Phil says we better get help. There's a village down the road that has an emergency van. Phil goes because he's the better driver and I'm still looking for Don.

I found him. I knew before I found him that it was too late. But I tried everything. I picked him up by the heels and let some water drain out of his lungs. I pressed on his back and on his chest. I tried mouth-to-mouth. I know I was doing it right because I learned how in health

class at school. But it didn't work. Nothing worked.

Phil got back with the emergency van and they said there was nothing to be done. I looked at Don once and looked away. I guess all the time I was working on him I hadn't really looked at him.

We never went back and I don't think either one of us even mentioned going up again because it just didn't feel right. When I'm remembering all the times up at the stream I try to keep that last time separate . . .

SHALL I KISS YOU WHEN?

Gabriel Gaylord

Shall I kiss you when?
The stars descend and angels come
To wipe thy face of tears, those
Drops of starlit crystals
Human eyes have never seen.
And mother to her child doth say,
"Of Aristotle's love and joy
Which is greater little boy?"
Shall I kiss you when?
The moonlight is a pleasant blue
When night elopes with you
Making room for an ocean voyage—
Enduring jungle fevers just when I see
An outline of your face implying harmony,
The fever's gone the love so strong
No longer am I all alone.